

Message Text

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E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR PINT VT VS
SUBJ: PAPAL CONCERN OVER SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

REF: ROME 11881

1. AS SUGGESTED IN REFTEL LEMAITRE'S REPORTING DOES REFLECT CONCERN RECENTLY VOICED BY THE CATHOLIC HIERARCHY IN MILITARY REGION I OF WHICH WE HAVE ALSO HAD INDICATIONS.
2. WE ASSUME DEPARTMENT WILL PROVIDE ROME WITH GUIDANCE ON HOW TO RESPOND TO ARCHBISHOP CASAROLI'S INQUIRY BUT SUGGEST THE FOLLOWING POINTS MIGHT BE INCLUDED:

A. THE RENEWED NORTH VIETNAMESE MILITARY PRESSURE IN THE NORTHERN PART OF THE RVN IS ACCOMPANIED BY SIMILAR NORTH VIETNAMESE MILITARY ACTIONS IN OTHER PARTS OF THE COUNTRY AS WELL. IT REFLECTS BASICALLY THE POLITICAL BANKRUPTCY OF THE COMMUNISTS WHO HAVE NO POLITICAL BASE OF ANY SIGNIFICANCE IN THE RVN AND CONSEQUENTLY HAVE BEEN UNWILLING TO EVEN DISCUSS A TIME SCHEDULE FOR PROCEEDING TO THE GENERAL ELECTIONS CALLED FOR IN THE PARIS AGREEMENT. IN SHORT, THE DRV AND ITS SOUTHERN EXTENSION -- THE SO-CALLED "PRG" -- SEE NO ALTERNATIVE AT THIS TIME TO MILITARY ACTION IN PURSUIT OF THEI

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OBJECTIVE AND WE MUST EXPECT THAT THEY WILL PRESS THE MILITARY OPTION IN SO FAR AS THEY ARE CAPABLE OF DOING SO. IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT THE MILITARY ACTION BEING CONDUCTED BY THE COMMUNISTS IS VIRTUALLY ENTIRELY BY THE DRV, I.E. BY THE NORTH VIETNAMESE ARMY. EVEN THE SO-CALLED LOCAL UNITS NOW CONSIST PREPONDERANTLY OF NORTH VIETNAMESE.

B. ALTHOUGH IN THE RECENT FIGHTING THE GOVERNMENT HAS LOST SOME OUTPOSTS IN REMOTE AREAS AND HAS GIVEN UP TWO DISTRICT TOWNS, THE VIETNAMESE ARMED FORCES HAVE GIVEN A VERY GOOD ACCOUNT OF THEMSELVES. THEY ARE FIGHTING WELL UNDER CONSIDERABLE RESTRICTIONS ON AMMUNITION. IN SOME CASES UNIMPORTANT REAL ESTATE HAS BEEN GIVEN UP FOR SOUND TACTICAL REASONS. HOWEVER, THE MILITARY BALANCE HAS NOT RPT NOT TILTED IN FAVOR OF THE COMMUNISTS.

C. IT IS TRUE THAT KIDNAPPINGS AND ABDUCTIONS HAVE INCREASED AND THAT NEW REFUGEES HAVE BEEN GENERATED. ONE OF THE COMMUNISTS' PRINCIPAL FRUSTRATIONS IS THAT THEY ARE UNABLE TO ENLIST THE VOLUNTARY SUPPORT OF THE POPULATION AND THEREFORE MUST RESORT TO WHOLESAL ABDUCTIONS IN ORDER TO GAIN SOME SEMBLANCE OF WORKING COMMUNITIES IN THE TERRITORY HELD BY THE COMMUNIST MILITARY FORCES. IN THE NORTHERN PART OF THE COUNTRY --- MILITARY REGION I WHICH INCLUDES HUE AND DANANG --- ABOUT 73,000 NEW REFUGEES WERE GENERATED AS A RESULT OF COMMUNISTS' ATTACKS BETWEEN MAY AND LATE AUGUST. OF THESE ABOUT 60,000 STILL REQUIRED ASSISTANCE AS OF AUGUST 11.

3. WE WHOLEHEARTEDLY ENDORSE EMBASSY ROME'S THOUGHT IN LAST SENTENCE OF REFTEL THAT THE CURRENT SITUATION MIGHT BE DISCUSSED WITH THE VATICAN AT A HIGH LEVEL BY AMBASSADOR LODGE OR ANOTHER KNOWLEDGEABLE SENIOR US OFFICIAL. SUCH A DISCUSSION COULD USEFULLY DEAL NOT ONLY WITH THE OVERALL SITUATION IN VIETNAM BUT ALSO WITH WHAT THE USG IS TRYING TO DO ABOUT IT BY WAY OF ECONOMIC AND MILITARY ASSISTANCE AS WELL AS SOME OF THE PROBLEMS WE ARE ENCOUNTERING IN FACE OF HANOI'S CONCERTED PROPAGANDA DRIVE TO UNDERCUT SUCH ASSISTANCE.
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